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Elizabeth Boyle & Deborah Hayden, editors 2014 *Authorities and Adaptations: The Reworking and Transmission of Textual Sources in Medieval Ireland*, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, ISBN 978-1-85500-225-8, xlvii + 361 pp., €35.

ANYONE with the least interest in popular music will be familiar with the experience where one hears a few bars on the radio and thinks one recognises the song, only to realise that it is not the 'real' version, but a new rendition by another artist. Take that experience, apply it to medieval Irish literature, and you will be at the heart of this book's concerns.

Based around a 2011 University of Cambridge advanced research workshop on 'Authorities and Adaptations: the Reworking and Transmission of Sources in Irish Textual Culture, c.1000–c.1200', this collection of essays, as its name suggests, explores the ways in which text was treated in medieval Ireland, how authority might be recognised in a text and the various ways in which the medieval Irish would (to misquote a modern slogan) redact, reuse and recycle text.

The book is competently edited by two rising stars of early Irish studies, now colleagues at Maynooth University, Elizabeth Boyle and Deborah Hayden. As well as all of the work that goes into producing a book like this, which can only be really appreciated by those who have done it, Boyle and Hayden have also co-written a thorough and interesting Introduction to the volume. Particularly resonant with this reviewer is their recognition that 'study of medieval manuscripts as whole entities is deserving of further analysis in an Irish context, as it provides much insight into the relationships between their constituent texts, the transmission of sources, and the motivations of individual compilers' (p. xl): this is an area of study that is only recently starting to garner significant scholarly attention, and there is much to be done.

The collection is a treasure trove, and will doubtless be much cited in coming years. Ruairí Ó hUiginn's 'Adapting Myth and Making History' takes as its focus the treatment by medieval scholars of Connacht prehistory, and the continuity of that treatment from ecclesiastical to lay scholars in medieval Connacht. Deborah Hayden, in her individual contribution, discusses metaphors employing body parts in *Auraicept na nÉces*. Hayden has emerged as a force to be reckoned with in the

study of the *Auraicept* since her Cambridge doctorate on the topic, and this essay shows the depth and breadth of her reading and thought on that text and those surrounding it. Paul Russell makes a preliminary study of the earliest three commentaries on *Amra Choluim Chille*, focussing not on textual relationships, but on the ways that the availability of source material affects the production of commentary.

Thomas Charles-Edwards seeks to unravel the transmission of the law text *Bretha Comaithchesa* by reviewing its various manuscript witnesses. His conclusions are clear and convincing. Minor aspects of the essay concerned this reviewer. A pervasive assumption that a scribe's performance is 'defective' because of being a 'less exact copyist' (p. 98) who has 'not bothered' (p. 117) to copy some glosses seems to assume rather more than is warranted about the intentions of that scribe, and to rest uneasily in the context of this book. Charles-Edwards's translation of the commentaries is generally exemplary, but there is one peculiarity: he favours the translation 'dog-shitting' for *conluan*, to which only the very sensitive would object, but later in the same passage, *conluain* is translated 'of dog-excrement' (p. 116), which obscures the commonality of the Irish lexicon: having ventured on 'dog-shitting', why not match it with 'of dogshit'?

Pádraig P. Ó Néill's contribution assesses Airbertach Mac Cosse's poem on the Psalter in light of its sources, exploring how psalter-exegetical material is reworked to suit its intended audience and purpose. Ó Néill's profound understanding of the historical and theological background makes this a rich discussion indeed. Brent Miles discusses the *Sermo ad reges* and comparable texts, although his 'speculation' (p. 155) that the *Sermo*'s compiler had a version of the *Hibernensis* containing material not included in any surviving version may perhaps be too reductive of the complex processes of adaptation that this book explores. Erich Poppe takes as his subject the text 'Christ's First Preaching' in the *Leabhar Breac*. The argument is underlain by formidable knowledge of the background. Poppe glosses over exactly how he thinks the Roman numerals MXXXVI and MLXXIX 'could probably be' misread for each other (p. 179), but his substantive argument on the particular combination of Latin and vernacular materials in the text is highly persuasive.

Hugh Fogarty leads the foray into vernacular literature with a study framed by a question over the usefulness and appropriate

use of intertextuality as a critical approach to medieval Irish texts. The substantive matter of his essay is *Aided Guill meic Carbada 7 Aided Gairb Blinne Rige*. He explores its use of phrasing usually applied to a tale's protagonist (particularly Cú Chulainn) to describe the antagonist in this tale, arguing, somewhat startlingly, that the purpose is to deprecate 'impetuous, impulsive behaviour' in battle (p. 208). Geraldine Parsons's account of Middle Irish textual treatments of Almu is framed somewhat distractingly by a description of the Hill of Allen in its current state, and is also marred by a lack of proofreading not found elsewhere in the book.

Elizabeth Boyle mounts a convincing argument that *De mirabilibus Hibernie* deliberately set out to adapt its international sources to form a text that reminds the Irish 'of their commonality, and of their shared participation in the wonders of Creation' (p. 261), by, amongst many other things, eliminating specific geographical references other than to Tara. Máire Ní Mhaonaigh's study of poetic authority in Middle Irish narrative, using *Cogadh Gáedhel re Gallaibh* as a case study, reveals a reliance on earlier authorities (typically poetic ones) not dissimilar to that employed by modern scholars. Her closing observation that the author's library must have been 'stocked with eleventh-century poetry, as well as with annals and other sources' (p. 288) is an important reminder always to consider context.

Kevin Murray closes the volume with a nicely-composed essay summing up its themes. He cautions of the 'mistaken approach' in 'studying narrative traditions which contain Middle Irish reworkings of extant earlier texts of privileging the older of the two' (p. 302). This warning is particularly relevant to scholars of medieval Irish law, who tend too readily to dismiss later accretions as 'an episode in a process of decomposition from an ideal form' (p. 302) rather than a rewarding subject for study. To return to the music metaphor with which this review opened, let us not forget that phenomenon of the late twentieth century, the dance mix/extended mix by the original artist, released concurrently with the shorter rendition designed for radio which might be mistaken for the 'canonical' version. It is a model that could beneficially be borne in mind when discussing medieval Irish texts: our quest for 'the' authoritative text may be missing the point. The richness of our materials lies precisely in

the multiplicity of authorities and adaptations, highlighted so effectively by this excellent book: as Murray points out, the best answer is 'all of the above'.

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